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Why A Lenten Season?

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THE KISS OF BETRAYAL

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By

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WHY A LENTEN SEASON?

THE Lenten season affords a period for introspection. "Would some power the gift to gie us to see ourselves as ithers see us," had better been written, "Would some power the gift to gie us to see ourselves as God sees us." In the last analysis the real value of personal spiritual worth is that which God Himself sets upon us. Relatives, friends, admirers, flatterers may applaud our seeming worth. God alone knows us as we really are. Even devout persons are deceived by the unctious satisfaction coming from the perfunctory performance of pious practices. Contact with the world has made them satisfied with spiritual mediocrity. The rush of daily tasks, the round of pleasurable distractions, the turmoil of domestic, social and economic exactions have dulled their perceptions and turned their eyes out toward the world instead of in toward God and their souls. They are content that while there may not be any excess of virtue neither is there any grossness of serious sins. Though all the while there is a positive absence of high spiritual ideals and willingness of sacrifice to attain them. The good that they would, they do not; the evil that they would not, that they do. The law of their members is in conflict with the law of their minds. The humility they admire, they arrogantly reject in the assertion of their alleged rights. The charity they love, they ruthlessly ignore in their cold disdain for others or their unscrupulous disre-

gard of reputations. The devotion they emulate in others, they find too irksome for themselves. So they are tossed hither and yon in the conflict ceaselessly raging within them. And

What Does It All Mean?

This—that, after all man is not disciplined, he is not his own master. He may be efficient in industrial, social or political spheres. He may actually marshal a nation's forces in bloody conflict and in serried ranks lead them on to victory. He may harness the elements, annihilate distance and bring the remotest parts of the earth into almost instant contact. But he does not control himself. He cannot be sure of his own loyalty to himself. In fact, he can more surely count on his own cowardice. Flirting with dangers, he will capitulate and basely surrender to the enemy he set out to conquer. Scientists have tried to explain it all by referring to man's dual personality, subliminal consciousness. Psychologists and psychiatrists have striven to palliate moral responsibility by the irresistible urge that goads its victim on to satisfaction. Advocating a theory of determinism that makes a man a creature of heredity or environment they have stripped moral turpitude of the hideousness of its malice and almost entirely exculpated the offender of all moral guilt. But

Let Us Be Honest

with ourselves. What is it all but common, lowdown temptation and sin. Begotten in sin and doomed to

suffer the penalties of our First Parents' transgression, we are groaning under the handicap of a weakened nature and will. We are the creatures of our own impulses, the playthings of our enemies, the World, the Devil and the Flesh. Neither innocence nor long sustained virtue gives any immunity from their attacks. Even Jesus, Himself, was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He was innocence and purity personified; He knew no sin, nay, He knew no impulse to sin. He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. He was the Light enlightening every man coming into this world. And yet He suffered His Soul to be clouded by the vilest temptations. The Devil challenged His mortified Spirit, His humility, nay, His loyalty to His own Godhead. "Command that these stones be made bread." Use the powers of divinity for the wanton display of the miraculous. "Cast thyself down" from the pinnacle of the temple. Behold the world in its splendor and magnificence. "All these will I give Thee if falling down Thou wilt adore me." He had spent forty days and forty nights in that desert that extends from Jericho to Jerusalem, a desolate, barren, inaccessible waste, abounding in precipices. Exposed to wind and rain, with the sky for a canopy and the cold rock for a pillow, exhausted and famished from His fast, yet fortified by all the virtue of His innocence and sustained by all the powers of His divinity, He suffered the devil to subject Him to these temptations—from what was less sinful, the preservation of life, to what was manifestly sinful, presumption and the most flagrant of all, apostasy from God. He would

teach us that temptation is the common lot of humanity. The hermit in the desert, the nun in the convent, the priest at the altar, the father at his daily tasks, the mother at the cradle with her babes, the young virgin in her innocence, the aged sinner in his penitence, all are equally subject to trial, all give testimony to the conflict raging between the law of their members and the law of their minds.

But notice, Jesus did not dally with the tempter. He declared no truce. But with all the vehemence of His soul, He repulsed Him. "Begone, Satan, the Lord thy God shalt thou adore and Him only shalt thou serve." And even as the calm follows the storm, so, "Angels came and ministered to Him." There is always more joy in the peace of an unsullied conscience than in the delights of sensuous or sensual gratification. But

The Sinner Says

"Jesus was God, Omnipotent. I am only a weakling, irresolute. My power of resistance has been broken by indulgence. Habit that has waxed strong with my years of pampering and yielding has now quite unhorsed me and left me weak and helpless on the field. Sin has wreaked its vengeance on my soul. Like that of a venomous serpent, its sting is deadly. It has killed the moral fiber of my being, weakened the resistance of my will, clouded my intelligence and clogged my reason. Vile seducer that it is, it blights everything it touches. For me there is no hope but constant indulgence."

Not so fast, unfortunate one. You have lost the sense of your kingly dignity, the realization of your absolute supremacy. There is a depth of power and strength lodged in the soul of every one of us to counterbalance our inherited common weakness. No monarch on his throne can exercise such authority over his subjects as I can exercise over the powers of my mind and body if I only will it. God has given me a power that makes me greater than all things around me, a power which He Himself will not restrict, a power which Hell itself cannot break—that is the absolute, unyielding power of my will. You may shackle and bind me, throw me behind prison bars, you may torture me with flames of fire or engulf me in boiling pitch, you may prick my naked chest with the cold steel of the sword or threaten my life at the point of the pistol, but you cannot change my "No" into "Yes," unless I will it. This is the endowment that makes me absolute in the domain of choice. Added to this is the help of God. He will give to every man powers, sufficient grace and strength to vanquish his enemy in every temptation. No matter how strong the impulse, how vivid the imagination, how commanding the occasion, we can still resist if we will. Of course, our

Willing Entails Discipline

The finesse of art, the skill of silence, the perfection of all doing, are dependent on persistent, untiring effort. The weakness of will was fostered by indulgence, the strength of the will must be developed

by denial. "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and only the violent shall bear it away." Unfortunately the *natural man* will do himself no violence. He fixes his thoughts on worldly comforts and honors, he consults his own tastes and likings, enjoys the good things of life, indulges himself in self-satisfaction and self-importance, revels in the enjoyment of wealth, power, distinction, popularity and credit. But the spiritual, the *supernatural man* realizes that his kingdom is not of this world. He is not here as in a permanent abiding place. He is a traveler on a journey towards eternity and he must endure hardships, trials, rebuffs and humiliations. With him the essence of religious obedience is not indulgence but abstinence, so like St. Paul he chastises his body that he may bring it under subjection. He mortifies his senses that they may be subservient to his dictates. He denies himself not only in what is sinful but even in what is lawful. He is aware of his own weakness and liability to sin, so he walks not on the edge of the precipice, the extreme of what is allowable. He rather keeps at a distance from evil so that he may be safe. He abstains from even the legitimate that he may not be tempted to the sinful; he fasts lest indulgence drive him to excess. He prays that he may enter not into temptation.

The world calls this self-control, the Church calls it self-denial—*mortification*. Jesus made it the price of fellowship with Him. "If any man will come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." He took upon Himself our nature and suffered death; and why? To save us

whom He needed not to save. He denied Himself. He took up His Cross. Every saint who ever trod the earth before or after Him walked in the narrow path of penance and self-denial. Daniel, first in power in the palaces of the greatest monarchs of his time, fasted in sack cloth and ashes and for weeks neither ate nor drank. David who had powers and riches lavished on him by God, yet, disciplined himself by mortification. And St. Paul counseled the Corinthians that "Every one who striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."

If the athlete can do violence to his appetite and deny himself in lawful things for a temporal crown, surely the soldier of Christ can do at least as much for an eternal one. So in this

Holy Season of Lent

good Christians who would fortify themselves against temptation that they may resist like Christ in the evil day, and make atonement for sins, not only their own, but also of others, must deny themselves not only in things that are sinful but even in those that are lawful. They must not only regulate and restrict their food but also curb their impulses, their ambitions, their preferences, their likes and dislikes. In the human body the pliancy of tissue, the resiliancy of muscle, the suppleness of the whole frame developed by regular, painstaking exercise, contribute to the prowess of the athlete in a conflict. So the restriction of our appetites, the restraining of our impulses, the curbing of our tend-

encies and inclinations bring us to the full stature and power of the real spiritual liberty of the sons of God. The veriest slave is the self-indulgent, the noblest freeman is the mortified man. Though possessing much the former is a vassal; though yielding everything, the latter is a king. The self-indulgent man is the slave of his impulses, the mortified man their lord and master.

Nothing is so likely to corrupt the heart or seduce us from God as to yield to self and have things our own way, to be the center of a little world of our own, to receive the admiration and the adulation of admirers or flatterers. The rich man in the gospel fared sumptuously every day and then lifted up his eyes in Hell, being in torments. Another rejoiced that he had much goods laid up for many years and his soul was requested of him that night. Demas forsook St. Paul, lost his vocation, having loved this present world and Solomon highly favored, divinely inspired, a rich and wise king, in his old age turned from God, loved many strange women and worshipped their gods. On the other hand, the Apostles left all things and followed Jesus. Like Him, they were paupers, without coat, or script or staff. They denied themselves creature comforts, even necessities, enduring hardships and in the day of trial stood up boldly for Christ and died martyrs' deaths. The early Christians sacrificed home, wealth, honor, endured isolation, insult, ignominy and in the hour of trial confessed Christ and won a glorious crown. In our own day there are amongst us noble men and women—their name is Le-

gion—who love the Church's disciplinary laws of fasting and abstinence, live mortified lives of detachment, practice voluntary self-abnegation, bodily pain and mental anguish, deeming it a privilege and an honor to suffer, and if need be, to die for Jesus Christ, their King. They are the salt of the earth, the leavening forces in society. Better by far, to be a pauper in rags, cheerfully suffering in innocence for Christ, than a king upon his throne, reveling in luxury and gloating on vanity, sensuality and worldliness.

The world scoffs at this idea of self-restraint; it advocates self-expression. The child must have what he wants when he wants it. The man and the woman must live their life of freedom. Their senses were given for gratification; the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, the nose for smelling, the tongue for speaking, the palate for tasting, the stomach for digesting, the heart for loving, the memory for recalling, the intellect for thinking and the will for determining. Each faculty must have satisfied the very purpose of its being and that as the individual dictates. There is a stunting in repression, a thwarting of purpose in denial. The full stature of manhood and womanhood is best attained only in the satisfaction of impulses. Complexes are the outgrowths of restriction and restraint. Development of faculties, increase in the capacity of doing, unfolding of the hidden powers of personality, are all the products of unrestrained activity. Give the child freedom to express himself in impulses, in likes and dislikes. Let the man enjoy the cravings of his matured instincts and aspirations. Let the woman live her life in untrammeled affection

and desire. This is the world's attitude. But see the disasters that follow in its wake—family limitation, companionate marriage, promiscuity in social life, license in courtships, prurient delight in the vile play, the indecent picture, the lascivious book, demoralization of youth, the shattering of moral standards, the disrespect for authority, the scoffings at religion, the diabolical effort at the dethronement of God Himself.

The new psychology has thus run its course only to find

MORAL WRECKAGE

on the high road of social and spiritual progress. It is but history repeating itself. Witness the effete civilizations that once dominated the world; majestic in their potentialities for good, but debauched by indulgence they tottered to their ruin and in their fall have dragged millions into moral bankruptcy. The Church like her Master is uncompromising in her fight with the devil and sin, no matter how attractive their form or specious their arguing. "Do penance," she cries out, "for the Kingdom of God is at hand." "Unless ye do penance ye shall all likewise perish." If the high road to salvation is strewn with the wrecks of the self-indulgent, it is also adorned by the heroes of penance and mortification. These stand as beacons lighting the course to true joy and peace; those as revolting specters overshadowing the way with gloom and despair. Man, she warns us, is not developed in body or soul by indulgence but by abstinence. A debauched generation will be saved not by gratification but by mortification. Thus the doctor saves the dia-

betic, the consumptive, the cancerous, the apoplectic as well as the physical and moral degenerate. Thus the coach brings the runner, the boxer, the batter, the fullback, to the full stature of athletic prowess.

Thus the local government keeps order in its parks, on its highways, health in all the avenues of life by "keep off the grass" signs, "keep to the right," "don't throw refuse on the streets," etc. Thus the schools maintain discipline in class and in recreation, thus the mother keeps clean her little hopeful who loves the mud, thus the Church fosters her saints, maintains healthy morality among her children. Thus

Jesus Christ Leads Us

all to purity and full spiritual stature. High upon a mountain top towering over all nations and people, to be seen at all times, Holy Church raises the figure of the dying Jesus—His majestic brow crowned with thorns, His eyes blinded with blood, His benign countenance bespattered with dirt and spittle. His tongue parched, His lips dry, His sacred hands and feet nailed, His side open, His whole body scourged, the flesh hanging in strips, the blood trickling to the ground, and as the countless generations of men pass in serried ranks beneath that cross, she cries out the warning of her Master, "He that loseth his life shall find it." "If anyone will come after Me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me." "Unless ye deny yourselves, ye can't be My disciples." The principle of life is in death. No man can really live until he dies. "Unless the grain of wheat falling

into the ground die, itself remaineth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." No field can produce until it has been ploughed and harrowed and tilled. No man can take his place in cultured society until his speech has been cleared of errors, his uncouth manners polished and his boorishness removed. Neither can any man take his rightful place in the Kingdom of Christ, until he has attained the refinement of Christian culture by mortification and penance.

There is a

Necessary Mortification

that no decent man or woman can escape. It's true that God gave us our eyes for seeing and we may look with pleasure upon a beautiful garden, a placid lake, an artistic painting, a noble countenance and every other honest creature that glorifies God in its comeliness and symmetry, but we have no right to gaze with wanton delight on filth, depravity, degeneracy or any form of debauchery. Common decency, as well as horror of sin, demands mortification of the eyes. Our ears were made for hearing and they can rejoice in the song of the birds, the chant of choristers, the universal music of the spheres, as well as in the exaltation of a neighbor's virtues or genius. But they must not listen to discord, to wrangling and rebellion, to slander or calumny, vituperation and scurrility. Respect for the rights and feelings of others, as well as obedience to God's laws demands mortification of the hearing. Our tongues can chant the glories of our Maker, extol the noble characters of our friends, in-

culcate the principles of truth and purity and justice, regale our companions with honest merriment and laughter, but they must not blaspheme, swear falsely, curse, tell the vile story or cut with sarcastic bitterness. Mortification and self-restraint must hold them to decency and respectability. The sense of touch so delicately poised in every part of our bodies has its honest purpose of creation but unless respectfully regarded, it will betray even the most wary into the vilest sins. Many an innocent love has suddenly flared into a violent passion through dalliance or wanton curiosity.

Faculties Must be Curbed

Not only the senses, but even the noblest faculties of man's soul must be curbed, else like the loosely reined steed of fable they will speed us to destruction. Memory, the silent witness of man's identity, testifying that the man gray and bent with years is the same as nestled in babyhood in the fostering arms of a nursing mother, may revive the joys of innocent hours and make vivid the familiar faces of youth but it dares not dwell with morbid delight on the sins of passed years. Intellect that lifts man out of the ranks of animality and in reason makes him like a God—that noble faculty whose genius has harnessed the fury of the elements, penetrated the hidden secrets of nature, soared even to the throne of divinity and with revelation has lifted the veil that screens eternity —even that faculty unguided and unshackled has led its most brilliant votaries to intellectual chaos here and eternal ruin hereafter. The will with its power

not only to do, but to choose to do, making man absolute in his realm of freedom will challenge authority, defy high heaven and dare damnation unless constantly held in check by the discipline of self-control —mortification.

Thus the refinement of Christian culture is attained not by unrestrained self-expression, but by constant unremitting self-repression. Thus the foundations of saintliness have been placed by closing up the avenues of sin. What a wonderful disciplinary system of self-control. What a valuable asset to psychology and psychiatry. If parents would but school their children thus to become masters of themselves; if men and women would learn that the fullest emancipation from the slavery of habit is not in larger license and unrestrained indulgence, but in masterful self-discipline, how fewer wrecks would be cast up on the shores of time, how fewer hospitals and prisons would be needed. The world must learn, we hope, not too late, that the nobility of manhood rests under God in the development of the faculty of self-control, and self-control is ennobled and fostered by mortification.

To the spiritually sane man, mortification is not a mere matter of choice. For man's fallen nature it is rather

A Matter of Necessity

We all are sinners. Jesus Christ was the unique character in human history who could challenge the Jews and the assembled nations of men to the end of time to convict Him of sin. Everyone else in the

highest flight of ecstatic soul union has to strike his breast and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus self-condemned we are self-doomed to atonement. Penance forever here on earth becomes our lot, we can never escape its exacting toll. That is why Holy Church gives us Lent, that in imitating the penitential life of Jesus we may through His divine merits strive to atone not only for our own personal sins but for the sins of humanity.

Besides the necessary and self-inflicted restrictions placed upon our senses and faculties, there is an obligatory abstinence from nourishing food in quantity and in quality imposed upon our appetites. The normally healthy Catholic may not eat and drink when and how he pleases. By a dietary system he is spiritually disciplined into self-control, mortification and atonement. Of course the weak and the infirm, children, youths attaining their majority, delicate mothers and workers whose tasks are of an exhausting character, as well as all persons fifty-nine years or over, are exempted from fasting. But all others are held by rigid laws of fasting and abstinence. Every Friday of the year is a day of abstinence, unless a solemn feast intervenes. All the weekdays of Lent are days of fasting. Ash Wednesday, the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent, Ember Days, the Vigils of Pentecost, of the Assumption, of All Saints and Christmas, and the forenoon of Holy Saturday, are days of fasting and abstinence. By abstinence there is forbidden the eating of flesh meat and of broth made of meat. By fasting it is ordained that only one full meal a day be taken with a small amount of food in the morning

and in the evening. Thus the Church helps her children to conform to Our Lord's law and spirit of penance.

But the mere fasting or abstinence avail little for a man's soul if endured only for dietary purposes. They will indeed be beneficial to his body. Physicians tell us that most persons eat too much; that meat is not absolutely essential for human life. For countless generations during the centuries before the deluge, man's diet was vegetative. Even now not only monks and cloistered nuns but even many lay persons abstain entirely from all meat and actually restrict their food to a minimum. So it is the purpose of the fast and the abstinence that matters. Only if endured penitentially in atonement for sin, will they profit the soul.

Even those legitimately exempted from the exactions of fast and abstinence are not exempted from a penitential spirit. Branded as criminals

All Must Make Atonement

and by atonement be united with God. In the priestly prayer of Jesus for the corporate union of His children in one fold under one shepherd, He also emphasized this union of the individual soul with Him. "That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us." Of what avail are all fasting and abstinence and other forms of mortification and penance unless they bring the soul into intimate union with Him? When we analyze it, what else can be the purpose of all religion? In the economy of salvation what is grander

than the spiritual equipment of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic, Roman Church? Admire the beauty of her liturgy, the harmony of her discipline, the consistency of her doctrine. See her hierarchic body of Bishops and Cardinals, presided over by our Holy Father, the Pope, teaching, guarding and directing the hundreds of millions of subjects scattered over the face of the earth.

Witness the efficacy of her sacramental system ministering to man's spiritual needs from life's dawn to death's decay. Behold her priests standing hourly at the altar in different parts of the world, gathering up in Holy Mass the precious Blood of Jesus as It courses from Calvary down through the centuries and again and again is offered to the eternal Father in atonement, while millions, priests and people, drink deep of Its saving power. See her thronged confessionals and crowded Communion rails, her churches taxed to capacity, seven, eight and ten times on a Sunday and then ask ourselves what does it all mean; what really is its ultimate purpose? There is only one answer, that in glorifying God and atoning for sin the individual soul is brought more closely into union with its God. Union with God! What a consummation devoutly to be wished. To become Christ-like—to put on Christ—nay actually to become another Christ—to be dominated by that divine personality so that He is everything and we are nothing! To see with the eyes of Christ, to hear with the ears of Christ, to speak with the tongue of Christ, to think with the mind of Christ, to love with the heart of Christ, to act with the spirit of Christ!!!—this is to

be a real Christian—surely one with Him and the Father—a full realization of the spiritual yearnings of St. Paul—"I live, now not I, Christ liveth in me."

Thus fasting and abstinence, all forms of interior and exterior mortification, all expressions of penance and atonement, all aspirations of the spiritual soul find their full value and significance in uniting the soul with God. In the rush of life's activities there is a danger that this ultimate personal object of all the Church's liturgy, teachings, discipline and devotions be lost sight of.

Lent Is the Retreat Period

for all Christians. It is the call of God to recollection and spiritual and moral adjustment. It is the inventory period when every man must compute his standing before God. Is the soul striving to effect this union with God? Is it advancing or receding? For there is no standstill on the high road to salvation. Either I am better or worse than a year ago. Either I am more mortified or more indulgent; either I am more recollected or more dissipated; either I am more prayerful or more worldly; either I am more penitent or more wilful. Introspection under the glare of God's refulgent light of truth and morality will disclose my real condition. The time is serious. Pleasures must be laid aside like the toys of the fevered child; appetites must be curbed; prayers must be multiplied; sacrifices must be redoubled. God has given me this sacred time for a holy purpose to chasten my soul by mortification and penance and

to unite it to Him. The very atmosphere of the season invites us to special meditation. Devotions in the parish churches are multiplied. Fundamental truths of doctrine and morality are expounded for our consideration. Calvary's story is daily rehearsed in her Scripture readings and Stations of the Cross. The great tragedy itself is repeated now in an unbloody manner in her daily Masses. Thousands are flocking daily to the Holy Sacrifice. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament are more frequent. Daily Communion is put within the reach of everyone. Thus the Church's disciplinary plan of self-restraint, mortification and atonement, gives the lie to the world's false philosophy of self-indulgence and license. Lives thus transformed become a leavening power in society. Homes are blest with peace, friendships are chastened and purified, business transactions more honorably and honestly adjusted, social relations more amicably indulged, religion more ardently fostered, God more heartily and universally loved. Lenten rigors while chastising the body and in penance atoning for its sins are freeing the spirit and blessing it with the real liberty of the sons of God.

Christian souls, be not deceived by the false principles of the hour. True life is in death, real freedom is in bondage, fullest joy is in suffering, truest peace is in mortification and penance.

Take your places in spirit in that barren, desolate waste with the mortified Jesus, feel the discomfort of His stony couch, be penetrated to the marrow by the chilly blasts of rain and cold that so mercilessly poured upon Him. Let your heartstrings

be torn by severance from those you love, let your eyes be closed to vanity to look only upon bleakness and desolation, let your ears be deaf to the siren call of pleasure, let your lips be sealed to uncharitableness, sarcasm and gossip, let your hearts be steeled to hardships and privations, let your throats be parched by thirst, your stomachs famished by hunger, while your souls, like that of Jesus, are joyfully communing in prayer with the Father. Then the ministering angels of purity and peace, of joy and spiritual delight will console and strengthen you. And in your discipline of self-control you will have tasted and seen that the Lord is sweet and abundantly rewards those dying daily to self, cheerfully taking up their cross and following Him.

FOR

"Life is a duty, dare it;
Life is a burden, bear it;
Life is a thorn-crown, wear it,
Though it break your heart in twain,
Though the burden crush you down,
Close your lips and hide your pain,
First the cross and then the crown."

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